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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION CONCERNING WESTERN SAHARA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1084 (1996) of 27 November 1996, in which the Council requested me to continue my efforts to break the impasse blocking the implementation of the settlement plan. The Council also requested me to propose alternative steps, in the framework of the plan, should there be no meaningful progress towards removing the obstacles to its implementation and to submit to the Council, by 9 May 1997, a comprehensive report on all significant developments, including their humanitarian aspects.

2. The present report covers developments since my interim report of 27 February 1997 (S/1997/166), including the initial contacts undertaken by my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara and other aspects relevant to the settlement plan.

II. MISSION OF THE PERSONAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

3. In an effort to encourage the parties, the Government of Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y del Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), to overcome the persisting stalemate, I appointed Mr. James A. Baker III, former Secretary of State of the United States of America, as my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara. I requested Mr. Baker to assess the implementability of the plan, to examine ways of improving the chances of resuming its implementation in the near future and, if there were none, to advise me on other possible ways of moving the peace process forward.

4. In preparation for Mr. Baker's visit to the region, my Acting Special Representative, Mr. Erik Jensen, held consultations in Rabat and Tindouf, to discuss with the parties various matters relevant to my Personal Envoy's mission.

5. Following consultations with me and preliminary discussions with the representatives of the two parties and the neighbouring countries, Algeria and

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Mauritania, in New York on 2 April, my Personal Envoy undertook an exploratory mission to the region from 23 to 28 April. On arrival in Rabat on 23 April, Mr. Baker and his delegation were joined by Mr. Jensen. Mr. Chester A. Crocker, former United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, also participated in the mission.

6. In Rabat, Mr. Baker was received by H.M. King Hassan II, and met with Crown Prince Sidi Mohamed, Prince Moulay Rachid, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Mr. Abdellatif Filali, the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Driss Basri, Advisors to the King, Mr. Driss Slaoui and Mr. André Azoulay, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Mr. Ahmed Snoussi, and other senior government officials.

7. In Algiers, where he arrived on 25 April, Mr. Baker was received by the President of Algeria, H.E. Mr. Liamine Zeroual, and met with the Prime Minister, Mr. Ahmed Ouyahia, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ahmed Attaf, the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations, Mr. Abdallah Baali, and other senior government officials.

8. In Nouakchott, on 26 April, my Personal Envoy was received by the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, H.E. Mr. Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, and met with Prime Minister Sheikh El-Avia Ould Mohamed Khouna, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sidi Ould Khliwa, and the Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations, Mr. Ahmed Ould Sid' Ahmed.

9. In the Tindouf area, on 27 April, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of the Frente POLISARIO, Mr. Mohamed Abdelaziz, as well as with Mr. Bachir Mustafa Sayed, who was until recently the Frente POLISARIO Coordinator with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the newly appointed Coordinator, Mr. M'hamed Khaddad, the Frente POLISARIO Representative in New York, Mr. Ahmed Bukhari, the Frente POLISARIO Representative in Washington, Mr. Moulud Said, and Saharan tribal leaders (sheikhs).

10. In Tindouf, my Personal Envoy also met with observers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to MINURSO. In this connection, I wish to express my appreciation to OAU for its continuing support of my efforts.

11. Following these initial contacts, it is Mr. Baker's intention to hold another round of consultations for more in-depth discussions relevant to the assessment that I have asked him to undertake.

12. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Government of Spain, whose decision to make an aircraft available to my Personal Envoy greatly facilitated his visit to the region.

III. MILITARY AND CIVILIAN POLICE ASPECTS

Military component

13. During the reporting period, the military component of MINURSO, led by Major-General Jorge Barroso de Moura (Portugal), continued to monitor and verify the ceasefire through daily ground patrols and helicopter reconnaissance. Its strength currently stands at 228 (see annex to the present report).

14. Cooperation with both the Royal Moroccan Army (RMA) and the Frente POLISARIO has been generally good. No violations of the ceasefire were reported during the period under review. However, there were instances where RMA failed to comply with certain technical requirements of the ceasefire rules, particularly with regard to the timely submission of requests for carrying out activities that are monitored by MINURSO. As RMA and the Frente POLISARIO continued to conduct live-fire exercises in almost all regions, the Force Commander requested both sides to refrain from undertaking such exercises with heavy weapons during May and June 1997, in order to avoid any potential rise in tension towards the end of the Mission's current mandate.

15. Once my Personal Envoy has completed his assessment of the situation, I shall review the strength of the military component of MINURSO and make recommendations on any further reductions that may be carried out without affecting the operational capability of the Mission to monitor and verify the ceasefire.

Civilian police component

16. In my interim report of 27 February (S/1997/166), I indicated that, in order to reduce costs further, it was my intention not to replace the personnel of the civilian police component of MINURSO at the end of their assignments, or earlier if agreed by their Governments. Consequently, the Acting Police Commissioner, Lieutenant-Colonel Jan H. Kleven (Norway), and three officers will be leaving at the end of their tour of duty on 31 May. The remaining five officers are expected to leave as soon as the necessary consultations with the Governments concerned have been completed.

IV. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SETTLEMENT PLAN

Release of prisoners of war

17. During my Personal Envoy's consultations in the Tindouf area, the Frente POLISARIO presented him with a list of 85 prisoners of war whom it proposed to release. This list was communicated to the Government of Morocco and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Repatriation of refugees

18. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is continuing its preparatory work for the repatriation of refugees, with the assistance of its Field Office in Tindouf. An international UNHCR staff member

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has also been appointed to Tindouf effective 15 February 1997. The priorities of this office, during the first six months, are to monitor the delivery of assistance and the welfare of refugees.

V. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

19. Currently, an amount of \$2,658,500 gross has been made available for the maintenance of the Mission for the month of June 1997 under the terms of General Assembly resolution 51/2 of 17 October 1996, subject to the extension of the mandate. My proposed budget for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 (A/51/763/Add.1) has been submitted to the General Assembly for consideration at the second part of its resumed fifty-first session. It is estimated that the monthly cost of maintaining MINURSO at its current strength will amount to \$2,425,650 gross beginning 1 July 1997. Therefore, should the Council decide to extend the mandate of the Mission, as recommended in paragraph 22 below, the cost of maintaining MINURSO would be within the monthly rate indicated above.

20. As at 30 April 1997, unpaid assessed contributions to the MINURSO special account for the period since the inception of the Mission to 30 November 1996 amounted to \$40.9 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at 30 April 1997 was \$1,644.5 million.

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

21. As I informed the Security Council in my letter to its President dated 17 March 1997 (S/1997/236), I have decided to intensify the examination of all the questions blocking the implementation of the settlement plan. Accordingly, I appointed Mr. James A. Baker III as my Personal Envoy to help me assess the situation and make appropriate recommendations to the Security Council. I wish to thank him for having accepted this task.

22. During his exploratory consultations with the parties and the two neighbouring countries, my Personal Envoy stressed that he had come to make a fresh assessment of the situation and to discuss with all concerned ways of breaking the current stalemate. Mr. Baker will return to the region in June, after which he will report to me on his findings and recommendations. I hope to be in a position thereafter to submit to the Security Council a comprehensive report on all aspects of the Western Sahara issue. In the meantime, I recommend that the mandate of MINURSO be extended for four months, until 30 September 1997.

23. Six years have elapsed since the establishment of MINURSO with the aim of holding a referendum of self-determination in Western Sahara. The international community has made it clear that it cannot continue to support the extension of MINURSO's mandate indefinitely and that the parties must demonstrate in a clear and tangible manner the political will necessary to take decisions that would bring about a fair and lasting solution to the problem of Western Sahara. I urge the parties to cooperate fully with my Personal Envoy, so as to achieve this goal and strengthen the prospects for peace and stability in the region.

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Annex

COMPOSITION OF THE MILITARY COMPONENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

Strength as at 2 May 1997			
	Military observers	Support units	Total
Argentina	1		1
Austria	4		4
Bangladesh	6		6
China	16		16
Egypt	19		19
El Salvador	2		2
France	25		25
Ghana	6	7 ^a	13
Greece	1		1
Guinea	3		3
Honduras	12		12
Ireland	8		8
Italy	5		5
Kenya	8		8
Malaysia	13		13
Nigeria	3		3
Pakistan	5		5
Poland	3		3
Portugal	5		5
Republic of Korea	0	20 ^b	20
Russian Federation	24		24
Tunisia	1		1
Uruguay	13		13
United States of America	15		15
Venezuela	3		3
Total	201	27	228

^a Force orderly room.

^b Medical personnel.

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